



ACLU of Massachusetts Joins National Effort to Expose FBI and Police Spying on Individuals and Political Groups

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BOSTON – The American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts today filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests on behalf of four organizations and 10 individuals whom it believes may be targets of domestic FBI surveillance. The FOIA requests are part of a nationwide effort by the ACLU to make public the nature and extent of the government’s domestic spying activities.

“We don’t want to return to the days when peaceful critics become subjects of government investigations,” said Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. “We think the public deserves to know more about the FBI’s secret spying agreements with the local police through the Joint Terrorism Task Forces.”

The controversial FBI-led task forces came under renewed scrutiny last month after Portland, Oregon became the first city in the nation to withdraw local law enforcement participation from the Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) rather than allow them to participate without proper oversight. The JTTF partnerships between the FBI and local police, in which local officers are “deputized” as federal agents, are intended to identify and monitor individuals and groups implicated in terrorism. But the ACLU charges that these task forces are allowing local police officers to target peaceful political and religious groups with no connection to terrorism.

“We are seeking the actual FBI files of groups and individuals targeted for speaking out, as well as information about how the practices and funding structure of the JTTFs may be encouraging rampant and unwarranted spying,” said John Reinstein, Legal Director for the ACLU of Massachusetts. “Resources and funds established to fight terrorism should not be misused to target innocent Americans who have done nothing more than criticize the government or practice their religion. Investigations should be based on actual evidence of wrong-doing.”

Attorneys with the national ACLU, meanwhile, today filed a lawsuit in federal court in Washington D.C. to compel the FBI to comply with a series of FOIA requests filed last December in six other states and the District of Columbia (Colorado, New Jersey, Oregon, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa). To date, the ACLU has received fewer than 20 pages in response to those FOIA requests.

The few records that have been disclosed confirm that FBI and local police are improperly investigating law abiding human rights and advocacy groups. In Colorado, for example, one memo indicates an ongoing federal interest in Food Not Bombs, a group that provides free vegetarian food to hungry people and protests war and poverty.

“Since when did feeding the homeless become a terrorist activity?” asked ACLU Associate Legal Director Ann Beeson. “When the FBI and local law enforcement target groups like Food Not Bombs under the guise of fighting terrorism, many Americans who oppose government policies will be discouraged from speaking out and exercising their rights.”

The documents obtained by the ACLU are not the only evidence that the FBI is building files on activists, Beeson said. A classified FBI intelligence memorandum disclosed publicly in November 2003 revealed that the FBI has actually directed police to target and monitor lawful political demonstrations under the rubric of fighting terrorism. This memo is available at

<http://www.aclu.org/SafeandFree/SafeandFree.cfm?ID=14450&c=206>.

The national ACLU complaint seeks files kept by the FBI on the ACLU, as well as Greenpeace, United for Peace and Justice, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

The ACLU of Massachusetts filed FOIA requests on behalf of the ACLU of Massachusetts and the ACLU Foundation of Massachusetts, and on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee--New England Regional Office, American -Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee--Massachusetts Chapter, International Action Committee Boston, John W. Roberts, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Charles “Chuck” Turner, Elaine Hagopian, Joseph Gerson, Kazi Toure, Stevan Kirschbaum, Yaju Dharmaraja and Naseer Aruri

Other states where FOIA requests were filed today include Missouri, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. More information on the national and state FOIAs, including a full list of clients, is online at www.aclu.org/spyfiles.

For details and legal papers regarding the FOIA requests filed today by the ACLU of Massachusetts, go to: www.aclu-mass.org.